

Urban governance and social worlds in China's cities
MA Seminar/China Studies

Talk & Screening Schedule

- 26 May Songyi “After Us, the Deluge”
 Jing Y. “Writing Mother Project”
- 2 June Li Yifan “ We were SMART”
- 9 June Fan Popo “Drum Tower” & “Mama Rainbow”
- 16 June 6 pm!! Daphne Xu “A Thousand-Year Stage” &
 work in progress: "Huahua's Dazzling
 World and its Myriad Temptations"

TROUBLE
何以解忧

May 26th

Song Yi: „After Us, the Deluge“



Songyi

“After Us, the Deluge”, 2016-2017, 59 min, language: Chinese with English subtitle

About the film:

In order to counteract the problems generated by Beijing's unrelenting urbanization, the central government devised a series of aggressive policies seeking to forcefully disperse clusters of migrant workers in the city. When these measures proved ineffective, the Beijing Bureau of Education opted for a less confrontational approach in 2014 that administratively prevented the children of migrant workers from enrolling in local public schools. Many of the workers were brought to submission when the future of their children was held hostage.

Against the backdrop of this rampant violation, an even greater injustice is the systematic and persistent exploitation of rural economies by the megacities. As much as the workers are excluded from the city, their only chance of survival is to dwell obstinately within it. What emerges can only be described as an interplay between haunting and exorcism. The workers are tossed to and from as they try everything in their power to maintain their beleaguered families, curbing the direct blows of power by simply making ends meet on a daily basis. The temporal nature of both the oppressor and the oppressed intimates the advent of a coming struggle of which we know nothing, yet.

About the filmmaker:

Song Yi, curator, writer and film maker.

He was a founder of the Migrant Workers Video Collective, co-director of art space “Institute For Provocation”, founder of “Bloom绽” curating collective for contemporary and urban planning. He was senior editor of LEAP magazine, former Head of Exhibition at Long March Space, coordinated “Ho Chi Minh trail” project.

May 26th

Jing Y.: „Writing Mother Project“



Jing Y.
“Writing Mother Project” (text work)

About the project:

Jing Y. will provide a first look into her most recent work “KINDEMIC: Words and Worlds of Migrant Female Workers”. The recently published book is the fifth episode of the series „Writing • Mothers“ organized and edited by artist and writer Jing Y. Consisting of more than 96,000 Chinese characters, it includes seven essays from four different Migrant Female Workers (MFWs), and four essays from writing mothers of different social status.. “Kindemic”, a word coined from “kinship” and “pandemic”, evokes the book’s focus on the vicissitudes of family relationships before and during the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in China.

“Writing • Mothers” is an ongoing collaborative writing project initiated by Jing Y. in July 2017 with Feng Junhua as its co-editor and publisher. Focusing on writing as a driver for the meeting of minds and lives, understanding situations, and responsible action, the project seeks to discover narrative-based and critically focused alternatives to political quietism.

About the artist:

Working closely with Chinese citizens who usually are not professional writers, Jing Y. founded “Writing • Mothers” project, and has since co-produced several books of their memoirs, reflections, debates, and statements. The Right to Write 2016-2018 featured at the 12th Shanghai Biennale in 2018 is example of how she works collaboratively with others, ranging from artists to amateurs with no experience in practicing art, within a form of multi-media installation. Her films, publications, and installations embody her method of “using art and documentary approaches to create self-made citizenship” in a period of political difficulty.

June 2nd

Li Yifan: „We were SMART“



Li Yifan

„We were SMART“ , 2019, 125 min, language: Chinese with English and Chinese subtitle

About the film:

We Were SMART opens in the world's factory, circa 2008. In the industrial zones of China's eastern coast, the younger generation of migrant workers created a marginalized subculture with exaggerated hairstyles, called "Sha-ma-te", a transliteration of the English word, SMART.

As a group, SMARTs had been left-behind when their parents migrated from poor rural areas in central and western China to the country's industrialized coastline. Most dropped out of school as teenagers, following their parents' footsteps to find jobs across the country. On average, SMART kids were fourteen years old when they took their first factory job.

Entirely based on SMART kids' memories and original footage from their mobile phones, the film tells the harsh story of these young workers' lives in the sweatshops and their inner struggles.

They yearned to be something other than mechanical extensions of an assembly line, becoming involved in the anti-mainstream culture of SMART in search of a sense of self-existence. The mainstream public discovered SMART via the internet, misreading and distorting the young workers' fantasies. By 2013, mainstream contempt and suppression forced the SMART kids to give up their illusions. They realized that there was no escape—even imaginary—from becoming part of the machine.

About the filmmaker:

Known as a director and a curator, Li Yifan was born in Wuhan, Hubei Province, in 1966. He graduated from the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing in 1991. He is now living and working in Chongqing. His documentary "Before the Flood", "CHRONICLE OF LONGWANG: A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A CHINESE VILLAGE" won several international awards, including the Wolfgang Prize of the Berlin Film Festival Youth Forum, the Joint Award of International Multimedia Authors of the French Real Film Festival, the Robert and Frances Flaherty Prize of the YIDFF of Japan, and the Documentary Humanitarian Award of the HKIFF, as well as the IDFA Jan Vrijman Fund Film Fund Award in the Netherlands and the Swiss Sud est Film Fund Award.

June 9th

Fan Popo: „Drum Tower“ & „Mama Rainbow“



Fan Popo

„Drum Tower“, 2018, 18min language: Chinese with English and Chinese subtitle

About the film:

Drum Tower (Gulou) is located in the downtown of Beijing. It has witnessed the dramatically changing landscape of this city- the government seals up “Holes in Wall” (illegal construction including doors and windows in the wall that were added for business purposes), and a lot street stores, like boutiques, bars and restaurants, are vanquished. Kacchan is a senior school student who wanders through hutong every day, escaping from classes. Once by accident, he meets a vintage shop owner in a public toilet and is fascinated by her, Miss Mi. The identity of being a transgender brings some inconvenience to Miss Mi’s life, at the same time her vintage shop is faced with being demolished. Kacchan sees her life in his eyes but can’t do anything to help, until the very day comes...

“Mama Rainbow”, 2012, 80 min, language: Chinese with English and Chinese subtitle

About the film:

For Chinese parents, finding out that their kid is gay usually presents a major tragedy, with the big majority utterly unable to accept the homosexuality of their son or daughter. However, during recent years a fresh rainbow wind has been blowing over the Chinese mainland: a pioneer generation of Chinese parents has been stepping up and speaking out on their love for their gay kids. This documentary features 6 mothers from all over China, who talk openly and freely about their experiences with their homosexual children. With their love, they are giving a whole new definition to Chinese-style family bonds.

About the filmmaker:

Popo Fan is a Berlin-based filmmaker, writer, and activist from China, where his queer documentary films have made a notable impact. Since 2016, he has concentrated on writing and directing scripted, sex-positive shorts. He is the founder of the Queer University Video Training Camp and has been an organizer of the Beijing Queer Film Festival for more than a decade. Popo was invited to sit on the jury of the Teddy Award of the Berlinale in 2019.

June 16th

Daphne Xu: „A Thousand-Year Stage“



Daphne Xu

“A Thousand-Year Stage”, 2020, 36 min, language: Chinese with English and Chinese subtitle

About the film:

A Thousand-Year Stage (2020) features local residents and migrant workers in Xiongan New Area, a region in Hebei, China slated to become a megacity, as they await its transformation. The film moves between Baigou Station and the construction site of “Asia’s largest train station”, Xiongan Station.

Additionally Xu will give a first glimpse into her work in progress: “Huahua’s Dazzling World and its Myriad Temptations“, 2021, 70 min, language: Chinese with English and Chinese subtitle

About the filmmaker:

Daphne Xu (b. 1992, Toronto) is an artist exploring the politics and poetics of place through film, video, photography, and printed matter. With a background in anthropology and city planning, her practice engages observations of the everyday and affective experiences of contested landscapes. She is working on a series of films in Xiongan New Area, Hebei, China’s most recently planned megacity; the first film A Thousand-Year Stage (2020) premiered at Visions du Réel.